

**Remarks of Chairman Henry A. Waxman
Energy and Commerce Agenda in the 111th Congress
January 13, 2009**

Good morning. I've been asked to speak to you about my priorities for the new Congress.

The last few months in Washington have been incredibly challenging. And as the new Congress begins, the work and pace of our efforts promise not to let up.

First and foremost, the ongoing economic crisis continues to confront us with challenges. I am optimistic that President-elect Obama and his economic policy team will be successful in their efforts to limit the impact of the crisis on our country and start us on a path to recover. This process is going to be difficult and costly for everyone.

But I believe with President Obama's inauguration, we will have a clarity of purpose and direction — and that his fundamental optimism for our long term future will help lift our country's spirit, and help the economy recover.

Adding to this challenge will be an ambitious legislative agenda. As the new Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I am hoping to craft legislation to implement the ambitious policy goals put forth by the President-elect. In particular, with regard to global warming and health care reform, we have an historic opportunity and an ambitious agenda of change.

Let me start by first looking at the health care agenda before turning to environmental policy as well as telecommunications issues.

Health Care Agenda

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to work with President-elect Obama and his Administration on ensuring that all Americans have access to affordable health care coverage.

The situation is critical. Every year we have seen the problem get worse. We now have 46 million Americans without health care coverage and many more Americans who are underinsured. As the recession continues, we will see more people lose their jobs and health care coverage.

We have costs that are too high. Workers, families, and business alike are paying more, and too often, getting less. And too frequently, we are not getting the quality care and appropriate care that we should get for our money.

We have people with chronic diseases like diabetes who don't take their medications because they can't afford the cost-sharing.

We have adults who don't have access to vaccines that could prevent illness and even death.

We have people who put off care until they get so sick that they end up in emergency rooms, costing the system much more and preserving their health care less.

But the opportunity we have now, at this time, to change this system, is the greatest we have ever had. President Obama has put the issue of health care on the top of his agenda. And former Senate Daschle, the nominee to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, has a long-standing commitment to comprehensive health reform. We have a Speaker in the House and leadership in the Senate that are determined to move forward. And on my own Committee, I plan to work hand in glove with the Chairman Emeritus of the Committee, John Dingell, and with the Subcommittee Chair Frank Pallone.

There are some who say that we must put this goal on hold because of the devastating problems we are facing with the economy. I look at it in a completely different way.

I think that restoring the health care system is critical to restoring our economy. The costly failure of our health care systems affects the financial health of our businesses and it affects the productivity of our workers. We can't successfully address the problems of our economy unless and until we address health care reform. And I intend that we do so.

This is an historic moment of opportunity that we cannot afford to miss.

There are many ways to go about this, and there undoubtedly will be a spirited debate about the best approach. But what is clearly the best approach is one that we can pass and that secures the goal of universal coverage, sensible controls on cost, and assurance of quality care.

President-elect Obama has laid out a workable and thoughtful blueprint to achieve this goal. His plan protects the employer-based coverage that is now in place.

It lets people who have coverage that works for them keep it. It strengthens the safety net of our vital public programs — Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

It gives people a choice to get good, accessible, affordable coverage either through a private plan or a public alternative.

It works to improve quality and efficiency. It stresses the importance of good coverage of prevention and wellness services and the management of chronic diseases.

The job is a big one. But now is the time to get this done.

We've also got some tasks before us that will require action in the days and weeks ahead. We have to pass economic recovery legislation and a very important component of that will be

the health care area, including federal assistance to states to maintain and support their Medicaid programs and to individuals losing their jobs and health care.

This week the House will act immediately to maintain the Children's Health Insurance Program that currently serves seven million kids but under the new bill, we will continue that coverage and extend it to millions of additional uninsured children. In the last Congress, we had bipartisan legislation to support and extend this program. It passed overwhelmingly in both Houses last Congress, but was vetoed by President Bush.

We intend to pass this legislation this week and get it to the new President's desk quickly so that we can stem the rising tide of the uninsured.

There will be a lot more on our agenda, of course. I am strongly committed to legislation that would bring generic biologics to the market, with sufficient incentives to protect innovation to be sure, but also assurance that we will get the appropriate and timely competition in the market that generic biologics can bring.

I also want to move quickly to provide the FDA with authority to regulate tobacco, the largest single killer of any legal product.

We have to focus on restoring the effectiveness of many of our public health agencies, from FDA to the Centers for Disease Control. They've been starved for resources for too long and too often, they had the scientific judgment of their professionals interfered with. These agencies need funding, support, and constructive criticism to do their job better and I intend to help restore the agencies to their intended role.

Energy and Environment Agenda

Another set of issues before the Committee is energy and its relation to the environment and to consumers.

Global warming will be one of my highest priorities. We are at a critical time in history where the policies we adopt today will determine our environment for generations to come.

Concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are rapidly building in the atmosphere. Science informs us that this is already causing serious and lasting harm. Continuing on our current path would be an environmental, economic, and national security disaster.

Our Earth is in the balance — and avoiding that issue is not answer. We now have a tremendous opportunity to work with the new Administration and the international community to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions, both in the short-term and over the next decades. This will require national legislation and international agreement.

First and foremost, I will be seeking to develop legislation that reduces greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently to avoid dangerous global warming. We will look to the science to guide

us as we develop this legislation. If we are successful in meeting this challenge, our climate policies will help transition America to a vibrant clean energy economy with good green jobs through investment in clean energy generation and energy efficiency technologies.

I will look to the proud history of the Commerce Committee in producing legislation such as the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. That legislation put in place a comprehensive and ambitious set of requirements to clean up the nation's polluted air. It has been a huge success story — allowing the economy to grow, developing new and prosperous sectors of the economy, and reducing the deadly burden of air pollution.

Global warming legislation can deliver similar benefits. The new Administration, majorities in Congress, environmental, business and religious communities, and citizens across America all recognize that now is the time to act on this grave threat. I am looking forward to working closely with all members of Congress who are interested in moving legislation forward.

President-elect Obama wants to make the U.S. a leader on climate change. I share his goal and will join with him to carry out this vision.

On Thursday, the Committee will hold its first hearing of the 111th Congress. We'll be hearing from 16 CEO's and Presidents of major corporations and nongovernmental organizations who are part of a broad coalition, the U.S. Climate Action Partnership, or US CAP. US CAP has recognized the urgent need for congressional action to address climate change. I'm looking forward to learning more about their specific recommendations on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Communications Agenda

Finally, let me say a few words about the communications agenda.

The most immediate issue we must address is the transition to digital television (DTV). Current law requires that on February 17, 2009, all television stations terminate analog broadcasts and transmit digital signals only. The transition to digital will improve the television experience for consumers by providing better pictures and sound, more programming choices, and interactive capabilities. It will also free up a significant portion of the airways for public safety communications and new broadband wireless services.

Serious problems have developed with the management of the transition, however, that could leave many consumers with analog TV sets in the dark after February 17. These problems are serious enough that President-elect Obama's Transition Team has asked Congress to delay the date of the transition. I am working with my colleagues in the House and Senate and the President-elect's team on a solution that will be most beneficial for consumers.

As a critical component of our nation's physical infrastructure and key driver of our economic growth, broadband deployment will be a priority for the Commerce Committee.

It is also important to ensure that federal efforts to spur broadband deployment or fund other communications-related services are managed in a way that protects the American taxpayer. Programs like the Universal Service Fund must be managed efficiently and transparently. I look forward to working with my colleagues on a bipartisan basis to ensure that public money is being spent carefully and with proper safeguards in place.

Conclusion

Thank you again for allowing me to share my thoughts on the year ahead. We face many challenges but also tremendous opportunities in the year ahead.